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ABSTRACT

Based on examination of a number of international business (IB) textbooks, all of which were found deficient in their treatment of the cross-cultural aspects of IB, 12 principles that should be reflected in the content and construction of IB texts are presented, with explanation and illustrations: (1) understand that culture is the basis of everything from the physical level up; (2) teach basic foundational information about culture, and let the details build on the foundation; (3) be informed by theories of experts in cross-cultural business communication; (4) raise cross-cultural issues when discussing other aspects of business or case studies; (5) teach sociological, philosophical, and anthropological categories, not isolated facts about cultural differences; (6) include appropriate examples; (7) answer the question, "How does culture influence business practices?"; (8) explain the reasons for a given cultural behavior or business practice; (9) provide the business implications of a given behavior or approach; (10) explain the phases of culture shock; (11) cultivate cross-cultural awareness through appropriate language use; and (12) provide a truly global perspective, rather than simply explain other cultures to Americans. A brief reading on values and attitudes is included. Contains nine references. (MSE)

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION ISSUES IN BUSINESS TEXTBOOKS: WHAT THE TEXTS SHOULD, BUT OFTEN DON'T, DO

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Cross-cultural Communication Issues in Business Textbooks:

What the Texts Should, but Often Don't, Do

As a teacher of Business English as a Second/Foreign Language and Cross-cultural Communication in international business, I decided to take a course in International Business (IB) to learn more about the field, understand some IB concepts, and learn new vocabulary to use when teaching.

The textbook we used was brand new; indeed, the copyright is 1995, even though it was Fall 1994 when we were using it. When I looked at the chapter on cross-cultural issues, however, I was shocked at what it did and did not communicate on the subject.

I have since looked at several IB textbooks, all borrowed from Business professors at Indiana University's Business school, and published between 1991 and 1995, mostly in 1994, all written both for undergraduate and graduate Business students. I found that all of them leave something to be desired and that most of them are seriously inadequate. This caused me to ask myself the question, what, precisely, is wrong with the way these textbook authors present the role of culture in international business and what, precisely, they need to be doing.

An author of an IB textbook needs to do the following:

I. UNDERSTAND THAT CULTURE IS THE BASIS OF EVERYTHING FROM THE PHYSICAL LEVEL UP

For the most part, the authors of the books I looked at do not really understand what "culture" is, and therefore they do not explain it or adequately apply it to international business matters. When I was talking with a Business professor who is actively educating himself on cross-cultural issues, he asked my opinion of a schema he was drawing for his students. The schema consisted of three circles, side by side, each overlapping the next, in the style of a Venn diagram. One of the circles would be economics, one would be business and one--he said--would be culture. I argued that culture is not a third element, equal to business and economics. Culture is the basis of everything above the physical level; therefore, economics and business are both culturally determined. That is, they are not merely influenced by culture: *They do not exist apart from culture*. This is something that was quite obvious to me, a Humanities person, but which it took my colleague, an economist, a long weekend of hard thinking to reconcile in his grasp of things. I found this same misunderstanding of the role of culture in more than one of the textbooks I looked at.

An author of an IB textbook needs to do the following:

II. TEACH BASIC, FOUNDATIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT CULTURE AND LET THE DETAILS BUILD ON THE FOUNDATION

This includes knowing which information to include (and which not to include), and how to organize and prioritize the information. The authors of these textbooks have trouble doing this partly because they do not know how to access and use scholarly work in the Humanities fields.

Unexplained lists. More than one textbook offered lists of information with no interpretation or explanation or application to business:

a) Khambata and Ajami repeat "Murdock's list of seventy cultural universals" (p. 25). The list includes "age grading, cooking, dream interpretation, gestures, government, housing hygiene, incest taboos, music, tool making, weaning and weather control." There is neither explanation of what any of this means cross-culturally, nor suggestions as to how to use this information in business. The authors do not even tell the reader who Murdock is, or for what purpose he drew up the list.

b) Taoka and Beeman (p. 305) tell readers that they will need to adapt business systems to cultural needs; and then they give a list (from Farmer and Richman--again, with no explanation of who they were or why they put their list together). The list is broken into two categories: "Educational-Cultural Variables" and "Sociological-Cultural Variables," and these categories contain the following items: vocational/technical training and secondary education, higher education, management

development programs, attitudes toward education, match between education and society needs; and attitudes toward management and managers, view of authority and subordinates, interorganizational cooperation, attitudes toward work and achievement, class structure and individual mobility, attitudes toward wealth and material gain, attitudes toward the scientific method, toward risk taking, toward change. This is not a bad list, but the authors do not help the reader know what to do with it.

c) Czinkota, et al., (p. 280) list Hofstede's four dimensions of culture: individualism v. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity, but they say absolutely nothing in explanation.

Inappropriate choice and organization of materials. Daniels, (p. 49), went to the trouble to read a reputable anthropological journal article to tell us that "infant stress can affect adult height, and fava bean consumption among some groups in malaria-prone regions can influence natural selection." He was trying to make the point that "differences in dominant characteristics can influence how business is conducted"--and ultimately explain that this is why "one U.S. company unsuccessfully attempted to sell in Japan men's slacks produced according to U.S. tailoring [size] patterns."

There are several problems with Daniels' treatment. First, the priorities are wrong. Given the limited space for cross-cultural information in this textbook (this chapter was 39 pages out of over 800 pages of text), what should be the most important issues to consider? Physical differences probably do not need to be mentioned at all, especially

in the absence of basic, foundational information and explanations about culture. Second, given the location within the chapter (in the first five paragraphs), a student might expect physical differences to be a significant part of the cross-cultural business experience. Third, this treatment confuses students as to whether or not physical characteristics are a part of culture, which, among other things, might well contribute to racism.

Czinkota, et al., in a section titled, "Values and Attitudes," offers a good example of a poor choice of information and poor organization of it. After two short sentences defining values and attitudes, the section tells us that the Japanese are anti-foreign, informs us that these kinds of problems can be overcome in the business context (with "tenacity, patience and drive"--nothing about learning about how the other culture works), goes on to say that change is considered a positive feature in industrialized nations, and informs us that status seekers are willing to pay more for foreign goods. (See the complete text in the appendix.) Nothing further was said in the section on Values and Attitudes. Not only did the authors fail to mention the many essential things that need to be covered in a section on those subjects, but also they demonstrated unclear logic, ignorance, and a dangerous attitude toward the Japanese as a model for their students.

The notable exception to this point, that of appropriately accessing and using the scholarship and theory in the field of cross-cultural communication, was Grosse and

Kujawa, who, in their chapter on cross-cultural things did a better-than-most job of teaching the major theorists and scholars in the field.

An author of an IB textbook needs to do the following:

III. BE INFORMED BY THE THEORIES OF EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

The only Humanities fields of discourse from which the textbook authors tended to draw are anthropology and/or sociology. By ignoring history, philosophy, linguistics, theology, art and art history, psychology, and some others, the authors deprive themselves and their students of rich resources for the interpretation of cultures.

Furthermore, no one mentioned Beamer, Victor, Trompenaars, or others working specifically in cross-cultural Business Communication. In all of these textbooks, an entire field of researchers and scholars dedicated to issues that are essential to the conducting of international business was ignored.

An IB textbook author should not isolate cross-cultural issues in a single, lone chapter, but needs, instead, to do the following:

IV. BRING UP CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES WHEN DISCUSSING OTHER ASPECTS OF BUSINESS, SUCH AS MANAGEMENT, MARKETING, POLITICS, FINANCE, MANUFACTURING, ETC., and BRING CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES INTO CASE STUDIES THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

I found a basic structural deficiency in the common approach that tended to isolate cross-cultural information in one chapter, thereby failing to show that culture permeates everything about human interactions, and, particularly, failing to demonstrate the effects of culture on each area of international business.

Cross-cultural issues regarding Personnel. Grosse and Kujawa (who, within their chapter on culture, do a better-than-usual job of discussing the subject) did not mention cultural differences even once in the entire chapter on Personnel Management (pp. 450-473), one of the areas of business most immediately impacted by cultural differences. Personnel management, for them, consists mainly of understanding how to use expatriate managers. Furthermore, while the authors discuss changing attitudes toward expatriates, how to calculate salaries for them, and their training, very little was said about cross-cultural communication issues, either for the managers' personal understanding or to enable them to manage people with different cultural values. Neither do the authors carry cultural implications through the rest of their book.

Cross-cultural issues in law. In none of the discussions of international legal issues does any author mention that some cultures operate under rule of law, whereas others do not.

a) Furthermore, Khambata and Ajami, in their section on international law (pp. 225--245), tell the unsuspecting business student that "one of the best ways to avoid

conflicts in international business is to have a clearly drafted contract, with all terms and conditions well understood by both parties." What happens when that student, now a business person, goes to Taiwan and discovers that his or her *clearly drafted*, signed contract is neither understood nor enforced in that culture the way a U.S. contract is?

b) Hill (pp. 50-51), talks about the difference between the numbers of lawyers in the U.S. and Japan, and concludes that the important difference is that the U.S. legal system allows juries, not judges, to fix damage awards in tort cases. He gives, however, no explanation about the cultural reasons for these differences, nor the implications of these differences either in law or other aspects of business.

c) Czinkota, et al., do mention that litigation is frowned upon in Japan and causes the parties to lose face (p. 251), but there is no further explanation, nor is mention made that this cultural value is shared with Chinese and other Asian cultures.

Cross-cultural issues regarding the black market. Khambata and Ajami quote an article on black market money in India (pp. 78--80). Even though the article leaves a very strong impression that the problem will be almost impossible to solve, Khambata and Ajami do not go into the complex cultural factors that contribute to the situation. The only suggestion is that the problem is caused by the poverty of underpaid civil servants. This is a simplistic and naive analysis, which, furthermore, can contribute to inappropriate attitudes in the minds of students who have not had sensitive and educative exposure to the devastating results of poverty.

The notable exception to the very grave failure of isolating cross-cultural issues in a single chapter is Hill's text. Hill intentionally placed cross-cultural issues at the beginning of his book (as opposed to, say, chapter 9 (Czinkota, et al.), or chapter 11 (Grosse and Kujawa)), and Hill consciously carries the implications throughout the book. Even Hill, however, makes the mistake of thinking that politics, economics, and law are separate from culture, so that he discusses those topics on pages 30--64, before discussing culture (pages 66--96). Also, his general discussion of culture is not so full as could be desired.

An IB textbook author should do the following:

V. TEACH SOCIOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CATEGORIES, NOT ISOLATED FACTS

The occasional detail here or there, or even many details unconnected, does not give the student a framework on which to build an understanding of cultural differences. It may confuse them or cause them to react negatively. When we do give students intellectual categories, like individualism and collectivism, universalism and particularism, power distance, etc., they are able to take in the many details and form them into a sensible whole. Furthermore, they are able to flesh out the skeleton when they hear details about another culture; that is, given a foundational basis, students will be able to interpret new data with which they have not been presented before. They can work from the details about a particular culture to the categories, and from

the categories to predicting or understanding further details concerning a specific culture. This approach also allows a student to "see oneself as ithers see him," thus gaining a non-judgemental approach to all cultures, including one's own.

An IB textbook author should do the following:

VI. CHOOSE APPROPRIATE EXAMPLES

An inappropriate or poorly explained example can lead to incorrect conclusions on the part of the student. For example, Khamata and Ajami (pp. 475-476), when discussing international staffing and labor issues, tell us: "In industrialized countries, the firm considers people through standardized procedures, such as application forms, personal interviews [etc.]...The selection process in LDCs [less developed countries] is less formal and involves less testing. Such considerations as family ties, social status...and common origin tend to influence the selection process." The implication is that the difference in hiring practises is a result of the level of development in a country. Italy is a country where family ties, social status and common origin can influence the selection process. Is Italy an LDC? Furthermore, the percentage of jobs in the U.S. found by word of mouth, that is, "who you know," is more than three times that found by general methods of job hunting. What is the difference between us and LDCs? China, definitely an LDC, is historically famous for having instituted testing as a means of procuring jobs.

The issue of hiring is complex and culturally determined; these authors not only failed to adequately explicate the issue, but they gave a wrong impression about what causes differences in hiring.

Later on in their book, these same authors give us the impression that cultural differences consist in being either "Western" (!) or "lesser developed. While discussing motivation, they tell us that "most workers in developing countries expect their employers to provide them with housing assistance or similar benefits..." The Japanese provide housing and many other benefits for their employees, but they are neither Western nor LDC.

Khambata and Ajami, in fact, have a serious tendency to confuse historical patterns (developed or not) with cultural patterns: to think that cultural difference equals developed versus developing. On pages 490-491, they talk about job security in terms of developed and developing nations, instead of in terms of cultural differences among Germany, Japan, the U.S., etc.

An IB textbook author should do the following:

VII. ANSWER THE QUESTION, "HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE BUSINESS PRACTISES?"

I make this suggestion after a discussion with my Business professor friend, and after looking at the textbooks. They have a tendency to ask, where did culture come from?

First of all, we cannot possibly answer that question except in highly theoretical ways, and secondly, the origins of culture is not the important question for Business students. The practical--and answerable-- question is this: In what ways does culture influence business practises and other behavior in the business world?

An IB textbook author should do the following:

VIII. EXPLAIN THE REASONS FOR A GIVEN CULTURAL BEHAVIOR OR BUSINESS PRACTISE

Every person who teaches or writes about cross-cultural communication will tell you that giving a simple list of do's and don'ts, or mentioning examples of different behaviors, is not only inadequate but also can contribute to negative attitudes about the other culture. ("What? The Chinese don't honor their contracts! They're cheaters! What? In Mexico, a mailman won't deliver mail without a tip! That's immoral!")

Furthermore, when one understands the cultural *reasons behind* a given behavior, one can not only correctly interpret the other's behavior in that situation, but one can also do so in a new situation. Understanding the cultural background will also help one know what is appropriate behavior for oneself in a variety of situations.

An IB textbook author should do the following:

IX. GIVE THE BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF A GIVEN CULTURAL BEHAVIOR OR APPROACH

Most of the textbooks I looked at did a fairly good job of demonstrating the business implications of the cultural issue they were discussing. Khambata and Ajami, for example, have a whole chapter on Comparative Management (pp. 266--277), where they discuss differences in managerial philosophies, decision making, etc., across several regions around the world.

An IB textbook author should do the following:

X. EXPLAIN THE PHASES OF CULTURE SHOCK

Despite their lengthy treatment of expatriates (pp. 450-473), Grosse and Kujawa did not even mention culture shock. Daniels (p. 67), defined and very briefly listed three stages, but failed to mention the readjustment stage upon returning home.

Czinkota, et al., did a very good job of covering culture shock (pp. 596--597).

An IB textbook author should do the following:

XI. CULTIVATE CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS BY USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

How one articulates information can make a big difference in attitudes toward that information. The following is a sampler of some of the more egregious and glaring

statements of apparent cultural insensitivity committed by our textbook authors. Whether the authors were merely ignorant or insensitive, we cannot judge; maybe nothing more than poor writing is at fault. Without going into explanatory detail, the perceptive reader will recognize that these passages inadvertently express the very attitudes that they might better have corrected. I bold the offending phrases.

1. Daniels calls Ghanaian shamans "**witch doctors**" (p. 75), informs us: "Studies have shown national differences in degree of **fatalism even** among managers in **fairly developed societies**" (p. 63), and that "...**even very primitive societies have complex languages**..." (p. 63).

2. Taoka and Beeman have a section on "**Superstitions**" (p. 296). 3. Czinkota, et al., mention "The **abrasive style of Russian** negotiators and their **usual last-minute change requests**..." (p. 272).

4. Grosse and Kujawa use the terms "**peasant-dominated societies**," meaning, I assume, agriculturally-based cultures and "**oriental** cultures" instead of Asian cultures (p. 295).

5. Hill, in his discussion of major world religions **included Confucianism**, which, strictly speaking, is not a religion, and **did not mention Judaism** (p. 81).

XII. BE TRULY GLOBAL IN PERSPECTIVE, NOT SIMPLY EXPLAINING OTHER CULTURES TO AMERICANS

Both Hill (p. 82) and Daniels (p. 58) discuss Weber's "Protestant work ethic," but neither one discusses S. Gordon Redding's, "The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism," which is a serious critique of the cultural assumptions in Weber's work.

By "writing with a global perspective," I mean write as though the audience were international, for it is! Many of the students in U.S. classes on international business are international students. Those students have experiences in, and understandings of, cultures other than the United States. Write as though the text were going to be marketed outside the United States, such that you are explaining U.S. practises to Japanese, and Japanese practises to Germans, and so on. At the very least, the textbook author needs to be aware that the reading audience is not U.S. college students only. The goal is to teach a variety of cultural perspectives and practises, and to stop perpetuating one's own cultural assumptions.

The more global we are in our perspective when preparing students for international work, the more global they will learn to be in their perspective. We need to teach our students to see things from all sides. This multiplies options for them, leading to improved problem solving. This teaches them flexibility. This teaches understanding and reduces arrogance. It can save them from making very expensive mistakes

through ignorance. Even if some of our students never do any international business, they still need a solid understanding of cross-cultural issues in business because America is, itself, a multi-cultural country here and now, where people often fail to communicate across cultural lines.

It is not hard to understand why the textbooks are so inadequate. The author(s) would be required to know at least two different fields: Business and Culture, and how they interact. Furthermore, these fields are not related fields in most U.S. school curricula: a Business professor is not likely to have studied the Humanities, anymore than a Humanities professor is likely to have studied Business. The educational backgrounds of the authors of the texts I studied were, predictably, Economics, Finance, Law, Marketing, Business Administration, and International Business. How much Humanities--including foreign languages, history, art, literature, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and comparative civilizations--do we suppose was part of their required coursework? It comes as no surprise to us that Business students confuse physical characteristics with culture, or that the concept of grouping countries according to similar cultural characteristics is unheard of among them.

If you don't know a field, you don't know what you don't know; therefore, you don't know *that* you are lacking information, you don't know *which* information you are lacking, and you don't know *how* to access that other field or that missing information.

This holds true for students, their professors, and people engaged in international business, alike.

I suspect that culture is one of those things that everybody thinks they know about, simply because it is all around them. It seems that some of these IB textbook authors, at least, assumed that one could have picked up enough about cross-cultural communications just by being alive, and reading the occasional article on it in the *Wall Street Journal*, or reading a book or two on anthropology. This incorrect assumption is a poor basis upon which to train the next generation of International Business students.

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APPENDIX: Selection from Czinkota, et al., titled "Values and Attitudes," pp. 270, 272

Values are shared beliefs or group norms that have been internalized by individuals. Attitudes are evaluations of alternatives based on these values. The Japanese culture raises an almost invisible--yet often unscalable--wall against all gaijin (foreigners). Many middle-aged bureaucrats and company officials, for example, feel that buying foreign products is downright unpatriotic. The resistance therefore is not so much to foreign products as to those who produce and market them. Similarly, foreign-based corporations have had difficulty in hiring university graduates or mid-career personnel because of bias against foreign employers.

Even under these adverse conditions, the race can be run and won through tenacity, patience and drive. As an example, Procter & Gamble has made impressive inroads with its products by adopting a long-term, Japanese-style view of profits. Since the mid-1970s, the company has gained some 20 percent of the detergent market and made Pampers a household word among Japanese mothers. The struggle toward such rewards can require foreign companies to take big losses for five years or more.

The more rooted that values and attitudes are in central beliefs (such as religion), the more cautiously the international business manager has to move. Attitudes toward change are basically positive in industrialized countries, whereas in more tradition-bound societies, change is viewed with great

suspicion--especially when it comes from a foreign entity. These situations call for thorough research, most likely a localized approach, and a major commitment at the top level for a considerable period of time.

Cultural differences in themselves can be a selling point suggesting luxury, prestige or status. Sometimes U.S. companies use domestic-marketing approaches when selling abroad because they believe the American look will sell the product. In Japan, Borden sells Lady Borden ice cream and Borden cheese deliberately packaged and labelled in English, exactly as they are in the United States. Similarly, in France, General Foods sells a chewing gum called Hollywood with an accompanying Pepsi generation type of ad campaign that pictures teenagers riding bicycles on the wrapper.

Occasionally, U.S. firms successfully use American themes abroad that would not succeed at home. In Japan, Levi Strauss promoted its popular jeans with a television campaign featuring James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, who represent the epitome of Japanese youth's fantasy of freedom from a staid, traditional society. The commercials helped to establish Levi's as the prestige jeans, and status-seeking Japanese youth now willingly pay 40 percent more for them than for local brands. Their authentic Levi's, however, are designed and mostly made in Japan, where buyers like a tighter fit than do Americans. At the same time, in the U.S. market many companies have been quite successful emphasizing their foreign, imported image.